Escape from
Singapore

Testimony of MARCUS CHENG



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CHINA INLAND MISSION

PHILADELPHIA—LONDON—TORONTO

MELBOURNE—SHANGHAI

CHUNGKING

Foreword

The writer of this story is the Rev. Marcus Cheng, B.A., one of China's best-known preachers and Bible teachers, the editor of an excellent Chinese devotional magazine called "Evangelism," and a man of God. As a result of his experiences God has put a new song in his mouth, and is calling him to a new enterprise—the establishment of a greatly needed Theological Seminary in Chungking, the capital of China.

-BISHOP FRANK HOUGHTON.

N THE SUMMER of 1941, responding to the repeated request of the churches of Singapore for special evangelistic meetings, after much prayer and consideration I decided to go. God gave me a definite promise, "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." This promise has been my comfort and mainstay during the last two years. God had also opened the way for me. I flew from Kunming to Burma, and in Rangoon had meetings in the Chinese Church and in the Judson Christian College. I arrived in Singapore on December 4, and four days later war broke out in the Pacific.

During more than four years of war in China, I had experienced many bombing raids and alarms, so that whenever I heard an alarm I would begin to tremble and run a temperature, even though my heart was at peace with God. I had hoped to

find some rest and change in Singapore, but to my surprise I endured more bombing and shelling in one week there than during the previous four years. God's grace was sufficient, and during that fearful time I had no trembling or temperature and no fear. The Island was shelled from sea and land, and was bombed from the air. There were no air raid shelters in Singapore. First in the pastor's home, and then in the basement of a friend's house, we tried to find shelter. I could not do anything but pray and read the Bible, especially the Psalms. When I came to Psalm 91:10, that wonderful promise of God took hold of me, "There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling." My first thought was that it was too good, for, according to that promise, no bombing or shelling should fall on my head, or even come nigh my dwelling. But God said to me, "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him, Amen." There and then I took God's word and I lived on it. Moment by moment, hour by hour, and day by day, I repeated that promise to myself while the bombs and shells fell all around.

I cannot describe the terrible condition of things. Often we felt the shock and blast of explosions right over our heads and before our faces. It seemed unreasonable, impossible, to believe such a promise, that no evil should even come near us. In the same house there were about eighty persons: men and women, old and young; some were Christians and some were not. As pastor, I led them in morning and evening worship every day, except at times when it was impossible. I told them the promise that God had given me. The intensity of the attack increased until, on the morning of February 15, I began to fear that some bomb or shrapnel might fall near us. If any of us had been hurt I would have been ashamed and, what was of more concern to me, God's Name would have been dishonored. That very morning in my reading I came to Isaiah 54, and in verse 4 I read, "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame."

That same afternoon hostilities ceased: for the welfare of the people the Governor surrendered and the Japanese came in. The next morning, together with the Christian owner of the house, my host, we went to see the damage. Every house around us was bombed or damaged, but on our house was not even the mark of shrapnel. God's promise had been literally fulfilled. All glory and praise to His Name!

On the morning of February 18, as I was shaving, a Japanese soldier came in from the back of the house where an automobile was standing. He demanded the key of the car, but as it did not belong to me I did not have it and could not give it to him. I tried to be as courteous as possible, but he became very angry, and taking hold of my shoulder he turned me around and raised his rifle to beat me, and also prepared to kick me.

At that very moment his interpreter, a Formosan, turned around and saw what was about to happen. He cried out, "Do not beat the old man." Strangely enough the soldier listened to him, put down his rifle and went away. All this took place behind my back, so that I did not know the danger and was not afraid. Afterward my hostess, who saw it all, told me. I replied, "There shall no evil befall thee." From that time this part of the promise became more applicable to me, but space does not permit me to tell of all the dangers and difficulties of the past two years. I can tell of only three examples.

One of the first orders given by the Japanese authorities was that all Chinese men, women, and children must leave their houses and assemble in a large open field to be examined. This meant that our homes were open to the Japanese to

examine and loot, while the people were out in the open for days and nights without shelter. At the examination, Japanese officers with police, detectives, and informers were seated, and machine guns were placed ready for action. We were ordered to walk or crawl before them. If anyone were even suspected of being anti-Japanese, or pro-British, or of having been in politics, or of coming from Chungking, or of anything else that the Japanese did not like, he was arrested and taken away, and no more was heard of him.

In some examination sections all who knew how to speak English were asked to hold up their hands; all such were arrested and taken away. The number of those taken in this way is unknown, but it was conservatively estimated at thirty thousand. We pastors in Singapore know definitely and personally over one hundred church members who were taken and who never returned. It is very probable that I should have been taken—for I had just come from Chungking, and for other reasons—but two days before, I was taken suddenly very ill and looked very thin and poor. Thus, looking more like a coolie than my usual properous self, I passed unnoticed.

Another order forbade pastors giving any "sermon or address" during worship. There-

after during services I read brief portions of Scripture followed by short explanations, and in this way I tried to help the people and also to comply with the Japanese orders. I was reported to the authorities as disobeying the law; a Japanese officer came, threatening to close the church, but God changed his mind; the church was not closed and I was not molested.

Later a detective warned me to hide in a certain church. He said that the Japanese police wanted me, knowing that two years before, my son had been the leader of a choir that had toured Malaya collecting some millions of dollars for the Chungking Government. I went to my room and prayed God for guidance. As I prayed I seemed to hear the words of Isaiah 51:12-13, "I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" Therefore I told the messenger that I would not hide myself. Later it was found out that this man was a

traitor and, sad to say, an ex-preacher. I was very much afraid of him. Soon afterward he became so paralyzed that he could not leave his bed, so did me no more mischief. May God have mercy on him.

During the first six months after the fall of Singapore, because of the Japanese orders I could not do much preaching. I devoted much time to prayer and, as a result, I wrote a book on intercession. At this time I suffered much difficulty, tribulation, danger, misunderstanding, slander, and insult; but the God of all comfort comforted me, through prayer and the study of His Word, and this resulted in the writing of a second book, entitled "The God of All Comfort," in which I have tried to comfort others with "the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

At the beginning of September I was led in a wonderful way to the Cameron Highlands, a cool mountain summer resort, where the Christian and Missionary Alliance had a Bible School and Rest Home for missionaries. This place had been reckoned as enemy property by the Japanese, but a few of us were allowed to stay there and look after the property for the Japanese. During the first few months the only Japanese soldiers at this resort were a few wounded men

who were there for rest, so we were very quiet and left much to ourselves. During four months of this time I had opportunity to write a book which had been in my mind for years, "A Catechism of the Christian Life," which is intended to help Christians to study the Bible in a systematic manner.

Following the completion of this book I had no opportunity to preach. For over forty years I have been accustomed to preparing my sermons on Saturdays and preaching them on Sundays, and this habit had become a part of my very life. Now lacking this outlet for spiritual labor I felt bound within myself, so that at the end of four or five Sundays I could not bear it any longer. Then I began to write out my sermons with pen and paper, imagining that I had an audience before me of about two thousand people (I always publish two thousand copies of any book I write). The first of the series consisted of twelve sermons on the subject of "Why Go to Church?" and the second series was entitled, "A Study of Twelve Promises of God." I found that in writing thus every Sunday it took about five hours, but as this was too much for me on Sunday, I took to writing two hours of it the previous Saturday evening. In writing out my message I dressed in my best

clothes and in every way behaved as when I was actually in the pulpit preaching to my congregation.

One Saturday evening as I was thus engaged, I heard a sound as of groans coming from without; and, supposing that it was a beggar wanting some help, I thought that I would wait until he actually reached the door before I would open to him, give him a dollar, and send him on his way. I heard the sound dying away in the distance and gave it no more thought, but the next morning when I went outside I saw large footprints of some animal just outside my door. From my vantage point on the hillside I saw some people below me and they called up to me to ask if I had heard the tiger who had been prowling around in the night. They had all been hiding away in terror. I said that I thought I had heard a beggar come to my door. They replied that it had been no beggar but a tiger who had visited me in the night! That afternoon the tiger paid me another visit, but this time, aware of the identity of my unwelcome guest, I was affrighted and hid away in my room. So God in His infinite mercy saved me from the mouth of the tiger. This occurred on May 29, 1943.

Some two weeks later I met something which was worse than a tiger. Two Japanese officers came to my room with handcuffs and an order for my arrest. They said that my passport was not in order and that I had no permission to live there. For some reason or other they did not arrest me, but summoned me to appear the next morning at their headquarters for examination. By way of explanation, let me say that the Japanese method of examination is to force a hose into a person's mouth, fill him with water until the body becomes bloated, and then use means to squeeze the water out again, thinking thereby they can extract a confession more speedily. In view of this knowledge of their practice, the least I could hope for was to be put in prison. I had already resigned myself to this prospect and was clothed in my warm clothes, and with my Bible secure in my possession.

Before I started out, and on the way there, I was praying to God, telling Him that He knew the things concerning me which, if they came out in the investigation of my case, would mean my being subjected to torture, if not death. The burden of my prayer was that God would close the mind and heart of the Japanese so that they would not ask those questions which would put

me in any jeopardy. While on the way there I was troubled in my heart just what to say and how I was to say it to the judge. These words of Christ came to me: "When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak." As I neared the entrance of their headquarters, my knees began to shake and tremble. I was not afraid in my heart, for I had the peace of God there. The words, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" comforted me.

I entered the courtyard and stood before the desk of the examining Japanese officer, with a Chinese pastor at my side who was to act as my interpreter. With my passport in his hand my inquisitor looked at me, then looking off to the right he saw another Japanese officer; he arose and went to this man, and together they conferred for about half an hour over my passport. The point was he did not believe that I was a pastor, but suspected me of being a spy for Britain or America, or else that I had some connection with the guerillas, who are numerous in the jungles of the mountain.

He came back from conferring with his companion to ask me where my home was in China. I replied that it was in Wuchang.

"Of what nationality is your church connection?" he asked next.

I said, "Sweden." I am a member of a Swedish Mission church; I told him the truth. He became angry.

He said, "You say 'Sweden' purposely, because Sweden is a neutral nation."

At this juncture my interpreter spoke up to explain that he himself was a member of the American Mission, and that I was there by invitation on the American Mission property. Meanwhile I was praying in my heart that God would close his mouth so that he would not ask me any more questions. Unable to express in words the intensity of my prayer, I clenched my fist as a sign to the Lord.

Just then a Chinese gentleman came in. He was the chairman of a Chinese Association. The examining officer arose and went with this man into another room and had a long talk with him. Afterward I learned that this talk was all about me. This man was a member of the Roman Catholic church and knew me quite well. He assured the Japanese officer that I was a Christian pastor, but the officer was next desirous of knowing where my living came from, seeing I was doing

no work. This Chinese friend informed him that we received our support from Christian friends or from churches. He came back from his conference much mollified. He did not ask me any more questions but delivered a long speech, instructing me that I must work, for if I did not work I should get no food! He further asked me if I had friends in Bangkok, where there was plenty of rice. I replied in the negative; I did not know of any friends in Bangkok. Then with a wave of his hand he sent me off. His final word was that before leaving the place I must first go and see him. How happy I was, and how grateful to God, can be better imagined than expressed in words.

Two weeks later I received a letter saying that the churches in Bangkok would invite me to go there to hold evangelistic and revival meetings, and that they had already sent a man with funds for my traveling expenses to escort me all the way there. On July 25, this escort arrived at my door bearing an official letter inviting me to go there. When I saw that the letter was dated June 16, I knew it was on that very day the Japanese officer ordered me to leave Singapore! At one end the Japanese were driving me away, and on the other end God was calling me to Bangkok!

As I had been instructed, I duly turned up at the Japanese headquarters to ask for permission to leave. I prayed that God would arrange matters so that the officer would be too busy to see me, and that he would send me off straight away. And this actually came to pass.

It took me thirteen days to journey from the Cameron Highlands to the city of Kota Bharu, on the border of Malaya, traveling by train, boat, and bus. During these thirteen days I had to pass inspection by the police more than twenty times. All my books and manuscripts were subjected to the closest scrutiny eight times: by Japanese officers, Malayan police, and Chinese traitors. In the preparation of these aforesaid books I had not thought that I should be able to return to China, but that these books would be published after the war. Now in these manuscripts there might be things mentioned which might make trouble, should they come under the eyes of the Japanese. Furthermore, on the back of my sermon outlines I had written the names of places where they had been delivered, and these names included such as Chungking, Kunming, and Kweiyang. This would indicate to the Japanese that I had come from Free China, and would be enough to condemn me to death. I could only

pray God that He would blind their eyes so that they would not see anything amiss. Once a Japanese officer, after close examination of some of my sermons, asked me if I wrote them out myself. Receiving an answer in the affirmative, he handed the manuscripts all back to me without any more questions. This time my manuscripts proved my salvation, for he thought that the man who could write such sermon outlines could not be a spy, but must surely be a Christian preacher!

But it was not so easy as I had supposed to cross the border to Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. Friends in Kota Bharu shook their heads and said, "Impossible!" when I told them that I was going to Bangkok. In the first place, only those who had resided there for two years were qualified to apply for passports; and only those who contributed a large sum of money to the Japanese could obtain passports. Then also one must be examined and believed to be pro-Japanese and loyal to Japan. This examination is done by a detective, secretly, over a period of two weeks. Then there is a Malayan police officer who must sign his name and affix his seal before the application can be recommended to the Japanese authorities. One must also bribe the Malayan police before the application will be presented to the Japanese officer. Finally, one must be cross-questioned by the Japanese. Only those who prove to be satisfactory to the Japanese officer may obtain passports. Even if every step is successful it may take three or four weeks to pass through all this procedure.

To make a long story short, in every step I found some unexpected Christian friend, Chinese or Indian, who had heard me preach in the church and who ventured to help me. It happened that the detective was a spiritually minded Christian. He accomplished in ten minutes what would normally take two weeks. He reported to the Japanese authorities, through the Malayan police officer, that I was "a good man." The most remarkable thing was that the Japanese officer came out himself from his office to the desk of the Malayan police, took my application and the other documents, and called me into his office.

He was reading my application and the recommendation as I stood before him, conscious that this was the most critical moment. If he cross-examined me and found me satisfactory he would give me a permit to cross the border to Thailand. If in any way he found out that I had come from Free China and was going back there he would at

least put me in jail. So I prayed God the same as I had before, that the Lord of heaven and earth would so control the Japanese mind and mouth that he would not ask me any questions. God heard my cry and saved me. That Japanese officer and I acted as if both of us were dumb. All the time we did not say a single word. He read the document and signed his name, and put his seal on the passport and handed it to me. The Malayan police stood by, and said in English, "One dollar!" I put the dollar on his desk, bowed to him, and went out.

The process thus described took me less than two hours. When I came out safely, with the passport in my hand, everyone there was surprised. I expressed my thanks to the friends there for their help. They all replied, "We have not helped; it is God who has done a miracle!"

Another difficulty which seemed insurmountable was the restriction on carrying money into Thailand, the maximum allowed being \$4.95. In the first office, one is searched and questioned carefully; then in the adjoining Thailand Immigration Office, one is required to pay more than twenty dollars as an entrance fee! In the third room, which is the Railway office, one must pay seventy dollars for a ticket to Bangkok.

How could one accomplish this seeming impossibility? As a Christian I honestly told the inspecting officer that I had only four dollars. Coming to the second office I found a friend standing there ready to pay all the expenses for me. Another friend paid for my ticket and escorted me to Bangkok. This I call "The Bank of Heaven" and "The Travel Service of Heaven."

Here I may also say that from the time of the Japanese occupation of Singapore I was, humanly speaking, "unemployed" and had no means of support. But I found even on that mountain there were not only tigers and Japanese—there was also a branch office of the "Bank of Heaven." A Christian brother in Singapore, whom I do not know, regularly sent me money enough to support me for the time I was there. He wrote that his family were in China. He could not send money to them through the bank, as the Japanese would not allow it; but he said, "I am sending you the money and I believe that God will pay the same to my family." So the "Bank of Heaven" will transfer money also!

I was in Bangkok two months and one week, and had meetings in all the five churches there, both for Chinese and Thai Christians. In one church I had the joy of receiving by baptism nineteen men and women. I traveled also to inland places for special meetings. Thailand is a stronghold of Buddhism. People there look at Christianity and Britain and America as identical. When the Thai Government declared war against Britain and America they regarded the Christian church as an enemy too. No Christian is allowed to hold office in the Government. Many Thai churches were closed down and many Thai Christians backslid. Saddest of all, some of their leading pastors relapsed into Buddhism.

In Thailand, Buddhism now imitates the example of Christianity in holding Sunday services. The most remarkable thing is that the policemen in every station are required to chant Buddhist prayers morning and evening. Thank God, there are some faithful Christians who stand steadfast and are willing to suffer with Christ. I am very glad to report that in Thailand, as well as in Malaya, all the Chinese churches are going on, and many of them are more prosperous than ever before. As a whole, the Chinese pastors and members stand the test. Many churches which had depended on foreign missions for funds and for workers are now self-supporting. They were agreeably surprised to find that they could carry the burden. May I also report that the

missionaries who are interned in Thailand and in Indo-China are treated very well; they are not under the direct control of the Japanese. I am sorry to say, however, that those who are interned in Singapore are in a miserable condition; they do not get enough food and are actually on the verge of starvation; many of them have died.

When I came to Bangkok I had in mind to proceed to Indo-China, and thence to return to my own country, Free China; but everybody told me that it was an impossibility—one could not get a passport, even to Indo-China. I tried my best to send a message to my friends in the Japanese-occupied area of China and asked them in some way to communicate with my family, that they might know that I was still alive, because for about two years my dear wife had not heard from me. She must have suffered more than I. I settled down in Bangkok, waiting eagerly for the peace that would come when the Allies had won the victory, and I would be free to return home again. After I had been two months in Bangkok, opportunities for Christian work lessened due to the tightening restrictions imposed on us. The police forced us to evacuate the premises owing to fear of air raids.

Just at that moment a little child from our Sunday school came to our compound and said to her little friends that her mother would soon go back to China. I overheard this and made inquiries. Her mother and father informed me that there was a northern route leading to China, a route not policed by the Japanese, and by which one can cross the border without a regular passport. Some Chinese friend could make special arrangements with the French police to obtain a permit to travel through Indo-China, to the border of Free China. How wonderful that a little child led the way! I just followed the advice, and prayed God for guidance and protection.

A Chinese preacher who lived and worked in Indo-China for many years volunteered to escort me to the border; he had a friend who had business on both sides of the border, who would take me across the line and help me to get a permit from the French authorities.

This was how I reached Haiphong, the seaport of Indo-China. There another friend escorted me by boat to Moncay. From Moncay, Indo-China, to Tunghing in Free China there was only one iron bridge across the dividing line. How happy I was when I walked across that bridge! At one end there were French soldiers

and Annam police, while at the other end our Chinese soldiers had a garrison. At the Chinese end of the bridge I saw a big portrait of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek which, after two years of oppression under the Japanese, was to me the symbol of freedom. To have possessed a picture of the Generalissimo, or to have even the characters of his name found on my person or in my home at the other end of the bridge would have meant instant death. The Japanese have killed many Chinese for no other reason than just that. Truly I can say with the Psalmist of old, "For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall."

I arrived in Free China on December 4, 1943. It reminded me at once of the time when I landed in Singapore, exactly two years earlier, to a day. I went there to work and to preach, but it turned out to be a time of rest and study. For many years I had longed to have a vacation but it had been impossible. I remember paying a visit of inspection to a so-called model prison in Changsha. It was so clean, I expressed the wish that I could occupy one of the cells for a time of rest and study. Now these two years I had obtained what I had hoped for! It had been a time of real rest and quiet study for me. I fed on the one

Book which I have loved and studied for more than forty years. I had plenty of leisure and therefore took time to study the New Testament in Greek and the Old Testament in Hebrew. How often "my heart burned within me" as the Scripture was opened up to me.

One day while thus meditating on the Word, I asked myself what all this meant. Why do I study the Scriptures day and night? For years my wife and I have talked and planned of the time when we should be sixty years of age, and feel free to retire from active work of preaching and teaching and give ourselves only to literary work. On that day, as I was thus thinking, the words of Scripture came to me: "Thy youth is renewed like the eagle's," and I rededicated myself to His service, promising God that I would continue to labor another fifteen years should He give me that length of time to live.

The first book that I bought and read after my entrance into Free China was that written by the Generalissimo, called *China's Destiny*, in which he gave his program for the post-war reconstruction of China. He figured that tens of thousands of doctors, teachers, engineers and other skilled workers will be necessary to accomplish this purpose. I could not but think of the tens of

thousands of evangelists, preachers and Bible teachers needed for the evangelization of China, a large part of which is hitherto untouched, and for the upbuilding of the Church of Christ in China. Where shall we get them? The Generalissimo, in his Christmas Eve broadcast to wounded soldiers, said he would send them Christian preachers to teach them the truth and instruct them how to live the new life. I could not but ask myself, "Where will he be able to get so many preachers?" I know for a fact that we have not enough Chinese preachers to supply the present needs, much less to meet post-war demands.

The first letter I received on arrival in China was that written by Bishop Frank Houghton, General Director of the China Inland Mission. After the first kind words of welcome he went on to say: "You will remember that more than once I asked you on behalf of the China Inland Mission whether you would be prepared to become Principal of a strong Bible Institute. We should be happy either to take responsibility for the Institute, or to cooperate whole-heartedly with you if you preferred that it should be on an independent foundation. It is becoming more and more clear that such an institution is an urgent

need. Some young Christians are going to modernistic institutions, and others are taking up other work simply because there is no suitable place where they can secure training. We have in mind an institution to which higher middle school students and university graduates would not hesitate to come. As far as foreign staff is concerned, we would hope to release some of our best missionaries for the task, but obviously it must be a truly Chinese institution if the right type of students is to be attracted. During the time which may elapse before you arrive in this country, we shall be praying that if this suggestion is of the Lord He may prepare your mind so that you may be ready to come and discuss it with us."

On January 15, when I arrived in Chungking, one of the first things I did was to go to the Headquarters of the China Inland Mission and have a long talk with the General Director. I told him that God had answered his prayer, and had prepared my mind to agree to his suggestion. After prayer and consideration we have decided to establish a theological seminary in Chungking on an independent basis. We shall trust God to supply the staff, the premises of the seminary, the financial support, as well as the students.

Bishop Houghton cabled at once to London, Philadelphia, Melbourne, and Sydney, to get friends all over the world to pray for this project, which will open, D. V., in the autumn of 1944.

I arrived home at last on January 21, 1944, with a heart full of praise and gratitude to God for bringing about reunion with my loved ones. I repeatedly asked them "Am I dreaming?"

On Christmas morning, while still on the way home, I had received the first family news in two years, and learned that my second daughter, Mary, one of the twins, was taken up to be with the Lord on July 30, 1943. She died of typhoid. This was soon after she was graduated from the University. She was a sincere Christian girl and very precious to me. In her last letter that she wrote me over two years ago, before I went to Singapore, she said, "The students in the University are giving time for reconsideration to the faith that was given them while as children in their homes and in high schools and I have done the same. As a consequence, I have come to believe more firmly than ever before in Jesus Christ, and in the Word of God. This is the fruit of parental teaching in the home." At the time I did not understand why she wrote thus to

me, but now I thank God for this testimony and the consolation it has given me.

The other day my wife and I were invited out by a young Christian couple, both graduates of the University. I asked them how they had become Christians. They replied, "It was Mary and Martha who led us to Christ." Martha is my first daughter. God has taken from me a most precious gift, but by His grace I was enabled to say as I stood by Mary's grave the other day that, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Since her going there my wife and I realize that Heaven is more real to us, eternity is nearer to us, while time is so short. Pray for us that we may be faithful and patient to the end. May God keep us all in His grace.

Note: The books which the author wrote during his time in Singapore are to be published in Chinese, in China, but are not available in English.—Ed.





